



# HEBRON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

HIGH EXPECTATIONS, BRIGHT FUTURES

## *Administration Office*

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Co-Chair Senator McCrory  
Co-Chair Representative Currey  
Ranking Member Senator Berthel  
Ranking Member Representative McCarty

Education Committee Members,

I am writing today in support of the concept of S.B. No. 1094 An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs and H.B. No. 6757 An Act Concerning Teacher Performance Evaluations.

In regards to H.B. No. 6757 An Act Concerning Teacher Performance Evaluations, I am in full support of the updates in this piece of important legislation. I teach the course series Leadership for Teaching and Learning in the Educational Leadership Program at Central Connecticut State University where educator growth and development, coupled with evaluation, is a central part of our work with our future administrators. I have also co-chaired the Professional Development and Evaluation Committees (PDEC) in two school districts over the past seven years. I am heartened to see a shift to research-based practices to support educator growth combined with the elimination of needless and unsupported practices that exist in the current evaluation system.

In regards to S.B. No. 1094 An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs, I support many of the fundamental concepts incorporated in the Right to Read legislation to move forward literacy instruction and student outcomes including:

- A reading curriculum that grows students who love to read and have strong skills in oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, rapid automatic name/letter fluency, and reading comprehension.
- By the end of first grade all students must be reading and by the end of third grade they must be reading independently.
- A model curriculum developed by the State Department of Education (SDE) with literacy experts from our state that districts can use to cross reference with our own curriculum.
- Training for all school leaders and teachers in the Science of Reading. The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) has already trained over 200

school leaders. SDE offers ReadConn and our district has expressed an interest in being a part of the next cohort.

- Reading teachers and trained reading tutors must be available for those children who are struggling readers and need more support.

Updates to S.B. No. 1094 An Act Concerning the Implementation of Reading Models or Programs that should be strongly considered include:

- There should not be mandated assessments or curriculum/programs. Curriculum should be authored at the local level with teachers at the table. Commercial programs may work for some districts; however, they should not be required.
- Waivers should not be required. Once the SDE literacy curriculum is authored, districts should be given time to audit their curriculum to the SDE curriculum and attest to meeting all of the components of the Science of Reading, similar to when superintendents are asked to attest to other items of importance through a signoff.
- If curriculum/programs were to be required, a faster approval and a continual review of new and updated curriculum/programs will be needed to keep pace with the available options. An expanded, dedicated team at SDE would be needed for this. The SDE literacy curriculum should, of course, be one of the options for districts to meet any requirements.
- Prioritize funds to support leaders and teachers with professional development in the Science of Reading over the cost of program reviews and materials.

As a superintendent, lecturer of educational leadership courses at Central Connecticut State University, former assistant superintendent, former curriculum director, former teacher, and former Board of Education member, I have been shocked and taken aback by the Right to Read legislation. Specifically, the concept of forced adoption of specific literacy assessments and curriculum infringes on local districts and Board of Education authority in the curriculum/program adoption process. This is a slippery slope towards state-wide curriculum/program mandates. I have found this concept to be as demoralizing as the existing teacher evaluation requirements that we are now, finally, looking to roll back after many years of data showing that it was a concept that was not rooted in the research of best practice for educator evaluation. Similar to the countless hours of work that our failed teacher evaluation system requires, the requirements of the Right to Read initiative are laborious and take away time from our efforts to support teachers in their implementation of the Science of Reading.

Locally, we have seen our literacy outcomes increase since moving to the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project materials with embedded professional development, along with supplements to the program. Throughout the pandemic, with the help of Columbia University, we made updates to our reading program with GAINS in student proficiency levels. Hebron is one of a handful of districts that saw a rise in literacy proficiency over the last three years. As we continue to incorporate additional aspects to our literacy program, in keeping with the Science of Reading, we continue to see student gains. We reviewed samples of the programs approved by SDE and determined it would make no sense for our district to make a dramatic change to a new program. The approved programs were a step back in our view. There are also questions about the cultural appropriateness of at least three of the approved programs, which gives us cause for concern about the review process that led to the programs that were approved. Our scores are headed in the right direction and we are committed to the integrity of our curriculum philosophy while making adjustments in reflection to the updated research in the teaching and learning of reading.

Several years ago, I was fortunate enough to be a part of the Commissioner's Mathematics Council. We were charged with reviewing mathematics education and outcomes in our state. It

was a committed council who worked diligently to develop recommendations for the state to undertake in mathematics. This is what is needed in literacy now, similar to the work that was just completed to significantly shift the educator evaluation process. It is my hope that we can pause the Right to Read legislation and do more listening to those of us closest to our students just like we did for mathematics and educator evaluation. Hopefully it will not take years of failed implementation, like it has for educator evaluation, before a shift towards a more inclusive process for literacy improvement is pursued.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Baird', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas J. Baird, EdD  
Superintendent of Schools